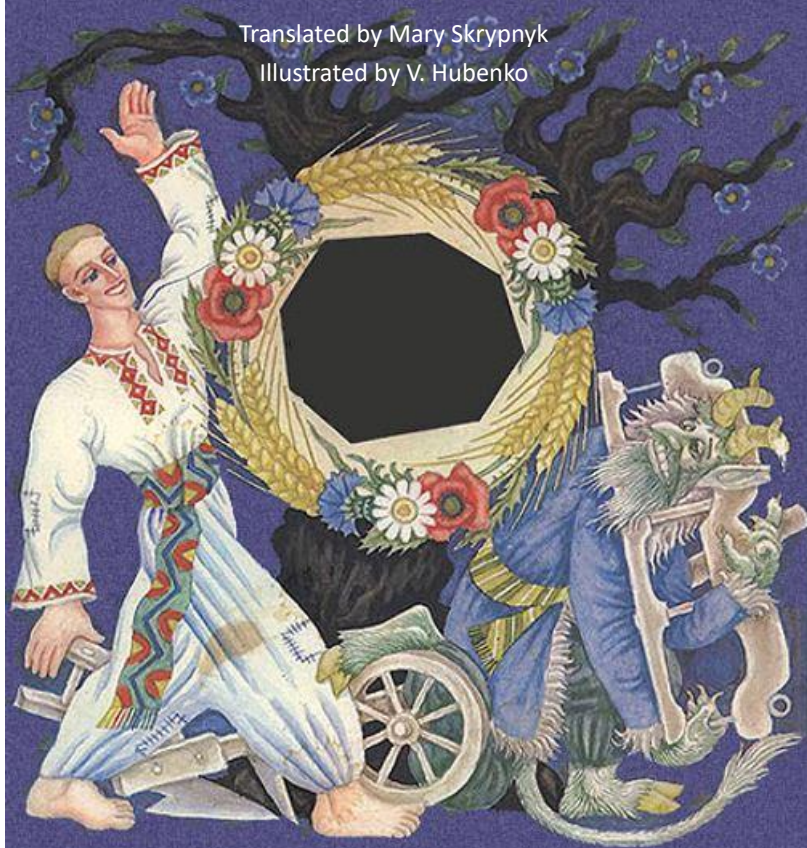


# UKRAINIAN FOLK TALE

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## THE MIRACLE OF THE STONE MOUNTAIN



In this tale I will tell you about a poor man who had three sons: Petro, Dmytro and foolish Fedko. The lads grew up, but all the land that the poor man owned could be jumped over by a rabbit. Poverty so strongly settled into this home, that even a club couldn't drive it out. Nor would sitting and weeping or standing and screaming help.

At last the poor man went to a rich man and said:

"Loan me a pair of oxen and a plough. My sons and I will pay you back

in labour whenever you may need us."

"Very well, you will hoe for three days in my fields."

"So be it."

The poor man drove the oxen up to his gate and called to his oldest son:

"Over there, beyond the village, is the broad Stone Mountain. Drive up there, plough it, and seed it with wheat."





Petro drove the oxen up to the mountain. He lifted the plough off the wagon and began to work. No sooner did he finish ploughing the first furrow, when a dark, hairy hand, rose out from the depths of the hill and struck the oxen so hard that the animals, together with the plough, flew head foremost into a deep ravine.

Sadly Petro returned home and told his father what had happened.

The poor man was furious, and shouted:

"Get out of my house! I don't want to see you again as long as I live!"

So Petro threw a jacket over his shoulders and went out into the world.

The poor man then went to another wealthy man. There again he borrowed oxen and a plough.

Arriving home, he called to his second son, saying:

"You are a bright lad. Go to Stone Mountain, plough it and seed it with wheat."

The second son got into the wagon and drove to the rock. The furrow his brother Petro had ploughed the day before had vanished as if it had never been. Dmytro rolled up his sleeves. He ploughed around the mountain once and began on his second furrow. No sooner did he reach the ravine when a dark, hairy hand rose out of the mountain and struck the oxen such a heavy blow that both they and the plough went over the cliff, leaving but a hum behind them.

Dmytro was frightened. How could he tell his father? The old man would kill him!

He threw a bag over his shoulder and ran off to catch up with his brother Petro.

The poor man awaited Dmytro, happy that at last the Stone Mountain would be tilled and planted.

But the day passed and his son did not return. The mother began to weep and he tried to console her.

"Don't cry, wife. Dmytro wants to finish the job and that is why he's so late."

The next day, foolish Fedko, the third son, suddenly stuck his head out over the oven bed and said:

"Father, Dmytro didn't plough the Stone Mountain. The oxen were killed, the plough broken, and Dmytro ran off to catch up with Petro."

"And who told you that, you fool?"

"Nobody. I know everything..."

The poor man went to the Mountain to see for himself. Looking over the cliff-side he saw the two pairs of oxen and the broken ploughs lying at the bottom of the ravine. He returned home, sat on the bench and grieved for his two sons. All night long he grieved and worried also about how he would be able to pay the rich men back without his sons.

"Don't worry, father," said Fedko from the oven bed, finally. "Tomorrow I will go and plough. Just get me a pair of oxen. I'll sow the wheat, find my brothers and bring back all the animals."

The poor man again went out and borrowed a couple of oxen and a plough.

Fedko got into the wagon, and singing, drove off to the Stone Mountain. When he looked down over the cliff his shirt turned clammy on his back. There, at the bottom, lay the four killed oxen and the two broken ploughs. When he had overcome his fear, the lad went to work. He ploughed one furrow and began on his second. Suddenly, out of the mountain, a dark, hairy hand again reached out and prepared to smite the two oxen as it had before.

But Fedko was quick. He dropped the reins and seized the hand. He held it as in a vice, and so strongly that no power on earth could have released it. Then he began to pull. He pulled and pulled till he was out of breath. After much bitter effort he pulled out the devilish creature. Grasping it by the hair, he threw it to the ground and held it down with his knee.

"You scoundrel! How dare you, without so much as by your leave, make mischief for people? Now that I've got you, I'll not let you out of my hands alive!"

"Don't take my life, Fedko!" begged the Devil, for it was he.

"My hands have long itched to get a hold of you..."

Fedko drew a pocket-knife from out of his shirt, cut off the tip of the Devil's left ear and pushed it under his belt.

"Now, you Devil, you'll harness yourself to the plough and plough the entire Stone Mountain so that it will grow a crop of golden wheat."

"But I don't like to plough, young fellow. I'll do something else..."

Fedko didn't listen. He took the yoke off the oxen and hanged it around the Devil's neck. Then he cracked his whip at him so hard that the evil spirit jumped.

"Away, you son of the Devil!"





The Devil pulled and pulled at the plough so that his eyes were almost popping, while Fedko marched behind holding the plough-handles and humming a little tune. How long they ploughed, I cannot say, but the cultivated earth on the Stone Mountain became soft as goose feathers.

The sweat poured off the Devil in rivulets.

"Now, Fedko, run and get the wheat, and I'll rest in the meantime," he said to the lad. "But quickly, because I have other work to do."

Fedko rushed home out of breath and standing at the gate shouted:

"Father, quickly give me some wheat to sow, because the Devil has no time!"

The poor man carried out a bag of wheat. He wouldn't give any more because he was afraid Fedko would waste it.

The Devil seeded the ploughed earth, harrowed it down with his tail, then bowed pathetically before Fedko and begged:

"Please give me back the tip of my left ear!"

"Maybe you'd like a pain in the side too, eh? I want to see my brothers Petro and Dmytro here immediately, or I'll light a candle to your memory!"

"Don't light any candles, Fedko! All will be as you wish."

At that moment an unexpected, terrible gale blew up. The wind ran riot, like that fool at a christening. The Devil sat on its peak and flew off who knows where. But he soon returned with Petro and Dmytro.





"Here are your brothers," he told Fedko. "Now give me back the tip of my left ear!"

"Not so fast, you clumsy idiot, why did you destroy the ploughs? I want them here with the oxen, alive and new!"

The Devil whirled about and sank down into the ravine. In a moment he was back with two new ploughs and living oxen.

"Now, please give me the tip of my left ear!" groaned the Devil. Fedko pulled the bit of skin out from under his belt and threw it to him:

"I don't want to see neither hide nor hair of you here again!" he threatened. "Stick to the ravines and the swamps where you belong, or you'll answer to me again!"

The Devil picked up the tip of his ear and took to his heels.

The brothers got into the wagons and drove home. The poor man was overjoyed at the sight of his sons.



Petro and Dmytro sat at the table telling their parents about their adventures, while Fedko climbed up on the oven bed and played with the cat.

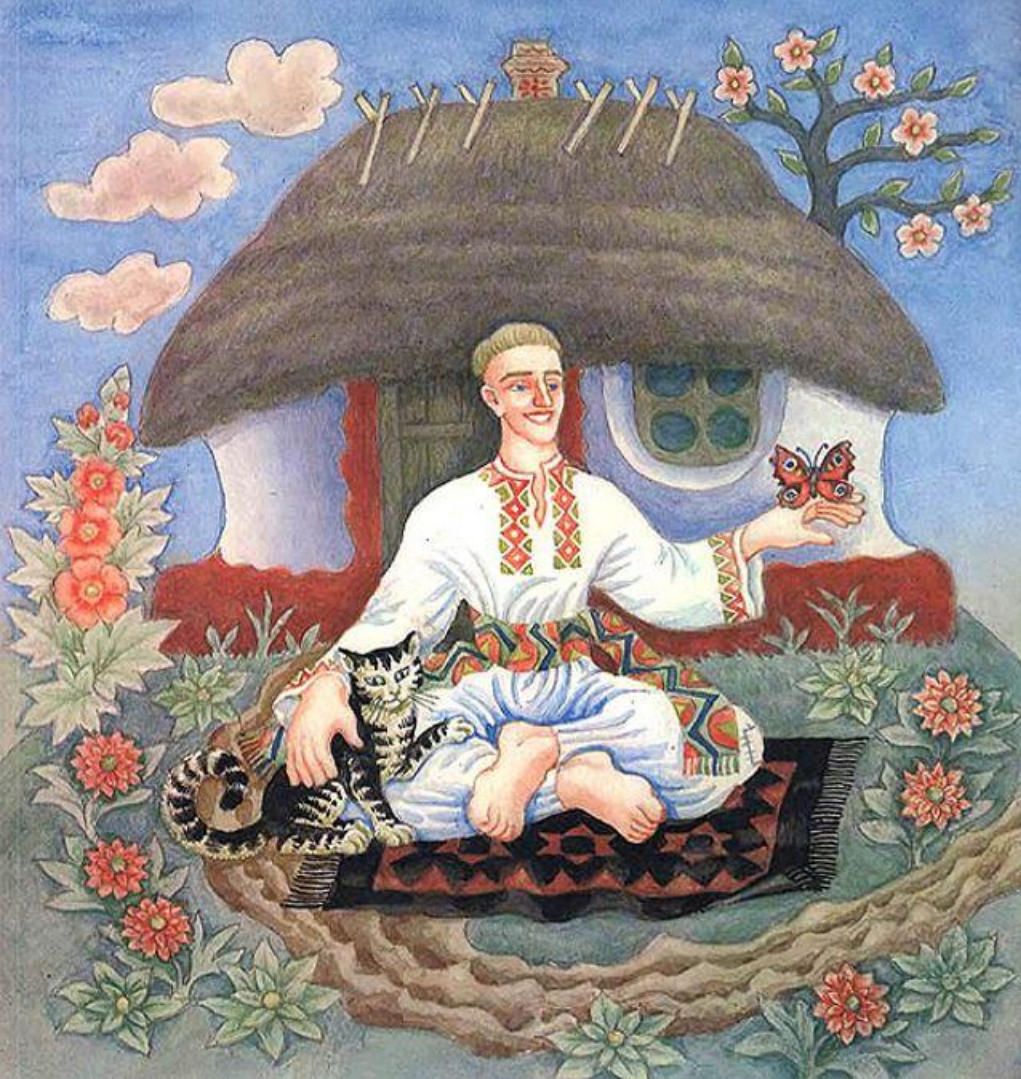
The next day the poor man went up to the Stone Mountain to see for himself if all was well done.





He stood as if rooted, not believing his own eyes, at the sight of the broad field of wheat before him, fully-grown and ripe for harvesting. The stalks were silver and the heads shone gold.





He rushed home and shouted:

"Come on, sons, get your sickles and off to the Stone Mountain! Our harvest is already here!"

Petro and Dmytro set out to work with a will, but Fedko remained behind, sitting on the oven bed.

We don't know what happened after this, because this is where the story ends.